



Rhode Island Rivers Council

One Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02908
www.ririvers.org



Meeting Minutes
June 12, 2013
RI Department of Administration
Conference Room B
One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI
Draft B

ATTENDANCE:

A. Members Present

Guy Lefebvre, Chair
Veronica Berounsky
Robert Billington
Rachel Calabro
Paul Gonsalves
Judith Hadley
Charles Horbert
Lisa McGreavy
Elise Torello

B. Guests in Attendance

Michael Zarum, Buckeye Brook Coalition

1. Call to Order

Mr. Lefebvre called the meeting to order at 4:10pm, and noted a quorum was present.

2. Minutes Approval

A motion was made by Mr. Gonsalves and seconded by Ms. Torello to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2013, meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. McGreavy, who was out of the country and not present at the meeting, abstained.

3. Recognition of Ms. Jane Sherman: A dozen years of service to the RI Rivers Council

The chair introduced the following resolution:

RESOLUTION IN RECOGNITION OF JANE SHERMAN'S SERVICE TO THE RI RIVERS COUNCIL AND THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

WHEREAS Ms. Jane Sherman of Providence has served as a Rhode Island Senate confirmed gubernatorial appointee of the Rhode Island Rivers Council since 2001; and
WHEREAS Ms. Sherman has actively participated in overseeing the RI Rivers Council program of five year term state designations of local watershed councils; and

WHEREAS Ms. Sherman has provided excellent guidance to the RI Rivers Council annual grant program aimed at strengthening local watershed councils throughout the state; and

WHEREAS Ms. Sherman served as a board member for many years to directly strengthen the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council; and

WHEREAS Ms. Sherman has provided much wise watershed policy guidance for the state's citizens and their rivers,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED on this day, June 12, 2013, the Rhode Island Rivers Council heartily thanks Jane Sherman for her highly admirable service to the people, wildlife and natural resources of the "lively experiment" we call the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

Mr. Lefebvre moved passage of the resolution which was seconded by Mr. Gonsalves and Ms. McGreavy. Mr. Lefebvre, Mr. Gonsalves and Ms. McGreavy noted Ms. Sherman's admirable service to the council. Mr. Lefebvre noted that an accompanying certificate of appreciation had been prepared to give to Ms. Sherman with the resolution. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Events

Paddle Across Rhode Island. Mr. Horbert noted the turbulent river flow circumstances that he, Mr. Cole and other participants encountered at the beginning of their paddle trip in northern Rhode Island in the Blackstone River watershed causing them to abandon the paddle this year. Mr. Horbert discussed several alternatives the group would consider for a similar trip next year. Mr. Lefebvre made note of a trip that Mr. Billington led down the Blackstone River in the 1990s which Mr. Billington described with the memorable phrase "We set out to change the river, and the river changed us."

Environmental Awareness Day at Narragansett Town Beach, July 13th.

The chair noted that the Rivers Council is registered to participate in this event.

Mr. Lefebvre, Ms. McGreavy and Ms. Hadley will staff the council exhibit.

Ms. Berounsky noted that the Narrow River Preservation Association will again participate and Ms. Torello said the Salt Ponds Coalition will also participate.

5. Local Watershed Councils

Summer Events & Activities

The chair noted the Blackstone River Theatre Summer Solstice Festival to be held at Diamond Hill Park in Cumberland that will held on Saturday June 22nd from 11am to 7pm that will feature about a dozen musical acts on three stages. Ms. Torello noted the Salt Ponds Coalition was planning a board meeting with fundraising consultant Simone Joyaux on June 17th, a pizza fundraiser on July 11th, a Ninigret paddle on July 27th, and a joint paddle with the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association on August 23rd.

Ms. Berounsky noted Narrow River Preservation Association is working with the Narrow River Land Trust. A property has recently been acquired in Middlebridge that offers a good opportunity to serve as a center for educational programs. The following events are scheduled: What lives in the river? June 15th, 9 to 11am; Full moon rising sunset paddle, July 20th, 4:30pm; Nature photography 101, August 17th, 9 to 11am; and Land Trust Days (guided walk to Garrison House), September 21st, 9 to 11am.

Designations Process

The chair noted that the Blackstone River Watershed Council / Friends of the Blackstone and the Narrow River Preservation Association are due for their five year term renewal to be a state designated watershed council this year. A revised one page set of criteria was distributed at the last meeting which will be sent to these two organizations with materials due in September and a public hearing scheduled before the November council meeting. Ms. Hadley requested and there was consensus that the council should send designated watershed councils a formal certificate upon being designated indicating the term of their designation.

Grant Program

The chair noted that FY13 grants to designated local watershed councils are due to be completed at the end of June. The chair also noted that his understanding was the FY14 council budget would be level funded and that there was a need to put together a package and schedule some meetings to request additional funding for the FY15 budget.

Annual Reports

The chair noted that the council received a calendar year 2012 annual report from the Buckeye Brook Coalition and noted that the report was well except that it did not contain financial information. The chair noted a detailed financial report is not necessary, but an accurate summary is desirable. Mr. Zarum, a member of the Buckeye Brook Coalition, said he would attend to that matter. Mr. Zarum also addressed Buckeye Brook Coalition's ongoing efforts with the TF Green Airport Improvements Program Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). He noted that the EIS process has continued since the Record of Decision (ROD) was issued in September, 2011. He was hopeful for an improved de-icing wastewater collection and treatment program, but expressed frustration at the pace of implementation. Similarly, no resolution has resulted for the wetlands mitigation element necessitated by alterations to be made to Buckeye Brook for safety improvements to be made at the southeast end of the short runway. Mr. Zarum also said that the funds necessary to implement the improvements program are approximately \$500 million, and even with 80% federal and 20% state contributions, funding is problematic from both the federal and state levels. The chair said he received an email earlier in the day from Richard Doucette of the FAA New England Office that contained a formal alteration of the ROD increasing the need for possible sound insulation mitigation from 157 housing units to 662 housing units at a cost in the range of \$10 to \$15 million. Mr. Zarum said the Buckeye Brook Coalition appreciated the council's assistance with the EIS process, and would update the council further.

6. Summer Meetings and Leadership Election Schedule (July to September)

Consensus was reached to not have a July meeting, and to hold the August meeting at the Coastal Institute at the URI Bay Campus in Narragansett. Ms. Berounsky will arrange the room reservation and the Narrow River Preservation Association will make a brief presentation. Pizza and soft beverage will be served. The nominating committee will work over the course of the summer to present a slate of officers for consideration for election at the September meeting.

7. Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park – Specific support for Congress to establish park as a permanent unit of the National Park System.

The chair introduced the following resolution:

RESOLUTION TO URGE CONGRESS TO ESTABLISH THE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

WHEREAS a Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor was established by Congress in 1986; and

WHEREAS an independent panel of experts in a Special Resources Study published in July, 2011, determined that the Blackstone River Valley's attributes provide great depth of insight to the historical industrial processes that shaped the development of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS the study defined a plan that includes five districts and other assets

in two states that possess high resource integrity and convey the industrial heritage themes of the valley along with the Blackstone River and Canal; and

WHEREAS former US Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and current US Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell have both visited the Blackstone River Valley and expressed their explicit support to establish this national historical park; and

WHEREAS the citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations have expressed wide support to establish this national historical park,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED on this day, June 12, 2013, the Rhode Island Rivers Council urges the 113th Congress to pass S371 and HR706, the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park Establishment Act, to make this national historical park a permanent unit of the National Park System and to appropriate funds to properly operate this national historical park.

Mr. Lefebvre moved passage which was seconded by Mr. Billington and several other members. Mr. Lefebvre said it was significant that two US Interior Secretaries, Secretary Ken Salazar and Secretary Sally Jewell, have come to the Blackstone Valley and explicitly endorsed the project. Mr. Billington said that the Special Resources Study was especially important in that national independent scholars certified the historical significance of the Blackstone River Valley to be clearly representative of the early industrialization of the country. Mr. Billington also said he understood that some or most of the state park land along the river would become part of the national historical park if established as well as the extent practical of the Blackstone Canal and River. Several members noted that they watched some or most of the twelve hour Ken Burns 2009 documentary about the formation of the National Park System and the documentary indicates that it is always a struggle to establish a new park. Mr. Billington said northeastern members of Congress are definitely in favor of establishment of the park, but western members are skeptical, particularly given the innovative nature of the park in which not all elements of the park (five representative villages) would be under the ownership of the park. The chair also provided members a *Providence Journal* newspaper article by Michael McKinney, dated June 1, 2013, entitled "Interior chief tours Blackstone – Push for national historical park in birthplace of Industrial Revolution gets new life with visit by new Interior secretary." The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Calabro said she was pleased to report that the bill to make the Beaver, Chipuxet, Pawcatuck, Queen and Wood Rivers part of National Wild and Scenic River System passed the US House of Representatives. Members said they were pleased to hear this news, and would like to learn about progress for the bill in the US Senate.

8. Policy Framework Outline

The chair passed out a two page outline of possible items that new members of the Rivers Council might make goals and priorities which ranged from backing the establishment of the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park and further implementing the Clean Water Act stormwater provisions to a variety of state and local policies to council administration of providing state designation and strengthening grants for local watershed councils. The chair also passed out an updated version of the council functional chart.

Mr. Lefebvre also passed out a *Providence Journal* article by Brian Rourke, dated April 27, 2013, entitled “Return of the Beavers – Town’s options: Eliminate or accommodate rebound” about the Town of Cumberland and the beaver population at Diamond Hill Park. Members spoke about how beavers and their activities were plentiful for centuries in the area’s waterways pre European contact with America. After contact, beaver pelts became significant monetary trade items between Native Americans and Europeans. As recently as a quarter century ago, beaver populations were very small in Rhode Island only residing in western Rhode Island near the Connecticut border. Mr. Horbert and Ms. McGreavy pointed out that RIDEM produced an informative technical bulletin about beaver populations in the state in 2002. Mr. Lefebvre said that the Quonset Museum in North Kingstown tells the story of the Department of Defense in the early 1940s creating a logo and mascot for the US Navy’s Construction Battalion (CB). Originally, they were going to choose the beaver because of its dam building activities; however, when facing confrontation, beavers generally choose flight rather than fight. Accordingly, the Navy chose the bee, and the SeaBees (also CBs) were established. Given that the beaver population has rebounded in the state, stewardship of the populations must now be balanced with the nuisance factor that they sometimes create such as tree felling and dam building at times found undesirable by the human population.

Regarding public land along rivers, Mr. Billington mentioned that the City of Central Falls is opening a campground on an island in the Blackstone River owned by the city. The new river island campground is described in a June 12th *Providence Journal* article by Zachary Malinowski entitled “Ready to pitch tents amid urban landscape – Campers to mark opening of state’s first city campground by spending the night.”

Ms. Hadley showed members the very nice quilt banner she crafted to greet participants of the Paddle Across Rhode Island event. She pointed out that the material used for the backing of the quilt banner was material she recovered from the Blackstone River Flood of 2005. Several members took pictures of the quilt banner and commended her for making it.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 5:50 pm.